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Family altar: helps and
suggestions for family

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THE FAMILY ALTAR.

HELPS AND SUGGESTIONS

FOR

FAMILY WORSHIP.

PREPARED BY

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THE FAMILY ALTAR.

THE family relation was instituted by God. Adam was not left alone. Eve was created to be his companion and to form with him a family. When the world was to be destroyed by flood, only eight persons being saved, those eight were included in the family of the pious Noah. And inasmuch as each of the three sons was charged to take his wife into the ark with him, provision was made for the continuance of the race in families. When Abram was called to leave his home and go into a far country and to establish a new race for the carrying out of God's purposes, he carried his family with him.

In each of these instances the intention of Jehovah is apparent, the establishment or re-establishment of the worship of the true God in the family, and, by means of the family, to ensure its purity and propagation. In

other words, God instituted the family relation expressly that it might be the basis of his own worship, though at the same time he has so constituted the human race that its happiness, purity, and safety are more wisely provided for than they could be in any other way. This can be shown by a comparative study of social life among various peoples and at different periods according to the scale or standard of the family relation.

If, then, the family was thus instituted by God, what could be more natural or obligatory than that a family, trained or being trained in the fear of God, should find its natural expression and exercise in the daily, united worship of him who was its author, and whose providence has so carefully guarded it in all the ages of the world?

And if the morning and evening sacrifice were needed and commanded in earlier times, is there any reason why we should offer less?

But some may ask, How can it be made practicable in these times of busy life? So many inevitable things conflict with the duty. Cooks will not come early, children

must be at school in time, and the man of the house must get to his business. This is all true, especially in the rush of city life. Nevertheless, if once convinced that family worship is essential to the best and highest good of the family, and to its best and highest influence on the world outside, surely the Christian head of a family will *find* the time or *take* the time, rightly considering that no other duty can rival it in importance.

The obligation is still further strengthened by remembering that he whose we are and whom we serve challenges a special proprietorship in the family relation, and lays just claim to the acknowledgment by the family of his sovereignty and goodness.

At the same time God is no hard task-master. To make this acknowledgment in a brief, pointed, appropriate way, suited to the needs and convenience of busy people, is not an insult to him, provided the curtailing be done in the letter and not in the spirit. Indeed, we all know how often the real worship is in the brief exercise rather than in the protracted one. It was a very short prayer, only a single sentence, which was so

highly commended by our Saviour. And where part of the family circle is composed of little children, brevity and simplicity are of prime necessity, without which they can have no share in the worship at all. By all means, then, let each part of the worship be short, simple, appropriate. But let it not be the brevity of haste nor the simplicity of indifference, but the result of earnest, prayerful, consecrated desire on the part of the leader to make the service a united offering of sincere worship on the part of all who share in it. Avoid humdrum monotony and cold formality. Youth demands life, variety.

The essential features of family worship are, first—

Reading the Scriptures.

This may be by the head of the family, father or widowed mother or whoever takes their place, or by some member of the family whom he may depute, or by reading in turn or responsively. Let the selection be such as all can understand and appreciate. While the children are quite small they will naturally be most readily attentive to the stories

of the Bible—little Samuel, the baby Moses, the flood, Joseph, Daniel, and the various incidents in the life of Jesus, etc., etc.

Then after a while it might be well to begin at the beginning, taking the historical parts of the Bible in regular course. It will of necessity often happen that in these short readings the thread of the story must be broken. When such is the case, do not fail to refresh the memory, the second day, by a few questions on what was read the day before. It will be so much the better if the father will take time to read the story over privately beforehand so as to be prepared to give any little word of explanation or local coloring which can make it clearer to the little ones.

Another suggestion in the line of variety is to turn aside every now and then from the stories when you get to a pause, and read the ten commandments or some preceptive passage.

The second essential feature of family worship is—

Prayer.

This should be short. A very small child

may be taught to be reverent because "we are talking to God."

The more closely the petitions follow Scripture phrases the better, for nowhere can any one who is anxious to learn to pray gain more efficient help than in his Bible.

A few model prayers will be given, which are by no means intended to be read in the act of worship. They are merely suggestive. For one who is not accustomed to hear his own voice in prayer it is sometimes exceedingly difficult, under the embarrassment, to think of anything to say. Read over one of these prayers beforehand, or one of David's, and get hold of a few appropriate petitions which you can keep in mind. Getting into the spirit of these may enable you to forget yourself and thus overcome embarrassment.

Many families close with the Lord's prayer, the whole circle joining in it. This is well. The form of the Lord's prayer was given by one who knew every need of human nature, and it is very full and complete—answers for any age or occasion. Every child should learn it, for it literally teaches us how to pray and what to pray for.

Still, it does not preclude the use of our own simple, personal petitions. And too constant or exclusive use or dependence on it may degenerate into cold formality which is especially to be guarded against in family worship.

If the family include boys, let me urge upon each father and mother the desirability of accustoming them at an early age to take part in the prayer. It will be an inestimable help to them in after years to know that they can pray in public without having to learn, and, I believe, a safeguard as well, to remember that they have done it in the sanctity of a Christian home.

There are several ways by which this may readily be done. One is by sentence prayers, in which the father will be followed by each young son in succession in a single sentence or petition. This for a beginning. At first the mother may need to prompt, but they will soon become quite ready and actually enjoy it; or they may be lead into it individually by either father or mother preparatory to being called upon in the family circle.

Thirdly, if at all practicable—

Singing.

All children love to sing, even the tiniest little tot who can do no more than make a noise. Of course it will be more enjoyable all round if the mother or some older member of the family can give the little ones some help outside, both as to words and tunes.

The busiest mother is often the one who accustoms herself to having her little ones around her most of the time. And while she sews, or attends to some other daily mother duty, she may be able to slip in a little singing lesson. The words and tune of some simple hymn, such as "Jesus loves me, this I know," "I am so glad that my Father in heaven," "One there is above all others," "Tell me the old, old story," etc., etc., thus learned will greatly add to the child's interest in family worship. When one of their own familiar hymns is given out, you may depend upon it they will sing with a right good will.

If there is a piano or organ in the house use it. If there is neither, and you cannot afford to get either, then more will of necessity depend on the leader, whoever is the

most musical member of the family ; still sing the best you can at any rate. The best we can always satisfies our heavenly Father, and generally the little ones, too.

Do not be afraid to venture on a new tune occasionally, as the children become accustomed to singing. Not too often, however, and when you do, if it has a chorus sing it over once, twice, thrice, or until the whole circle is in a measure familiar with it ; or sing the whole first verse a second or third time, and let that suffice for the singing for the morning. More than likely, tune and words will be running in everybody's head all day long and will never be objectionably *new* again.

But some may say : " We are not a musical family, and the singing would be only irksome and distasteful."

I risk the assertion that a taste for sacred music is largely a matter of cultivation. Suppose there isn't any special talent or taste for music, would it not be well to cultivate whatever there is, inasmuch as we are commanded to praise God in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, and are nowhere authorized to delegate this duty to others ?

Some may demur that even with every part of the service as brief as it can be made, the whole would occupy more than could be spared from business.

Ah, dear Christian friends, to whom, I am sure, the eternal welfare and life-long usefulness of your children is more precious than anything else in the world, let not this restless thought of time find lodgment in your mind for a moment. As a dear old friend of mine used to say: "Let us hurry somewhere else, not here."

Make up your mind you *will* have time for family worship. Get up as early in the morning as may be necessary to do so without any feeling of flurry or anxiety. And find some convenient time for it between supper and bedtime, before the children get sleepy. I guarantee the day will not seem any shorter for work, school, or play, for the fifteen minutes given to God each end. Nay, it is positively certain that the quietude of spirit gained thereby will actually ensure the accomplishment of more in the day.

The blessing of the Lord will most assuredly rest upon the family which keeps the

fire of his worship alive on the altar in their midst, which offers to God a daily sacrifice of praise and prayer, and a ready ear to learn his will. The home thereby becomes a little sanctuary where the Saviour delights to abide. And it cannot but be that the father from such a home carries with him to his daily toil, peace, protection, and divinely-given wisdom, that the mother bears about with her all day the sustaining strength of the Son of man, and the spirit of gentleness to sooth ruffled tempers, and that the remembrance of the moments spent around the family altar will many a time prove to the child a safeguard and talisman in the hour of temptation.

Scripture Readings for Daily Use.

Gen. i. 1-13.	Gen. vii. 1-13.
Gen. i. 14-27.	Gen. vii. 14-24.
Gen. ii. 1-3, with Exod.	Gen. viii. 1-12.
xx. 1-11.	Gen. viii. 15-22.
Gen. ii. 6-25.	Gen. ix. 1-19.
Gen. iii. 1-13, and 23, 24.	Gen. xi. 1-9; 27-32.
Gen. iv. 1-12.	Gen. xii. 1-20.
Gen. vi. 1, 5, 8, 14, 17.	

Preceptive passages that may be used for change:

Matt. v. 1-9.	Ps. cxix., in parts.
Eph. vi. 1-19.	2 Tim. iii. 14-17.
Prov. xv. 1-9.	Eph. vi. 10-18.
Prov. vi. 6-20.	Matt. xvi. 24-28.
Rev. xxii. 1-8, etc.	Mark ix. 33-37; 41-48.

As the children grow older, a very good plan, for either morning or evening, is to take up the Sunday-school lesson.

If they are in the habit of studying their lesson Sunday afternoon, so much the better. The list of daily readings given with most lesson-helps will then be intelligently connected with the subject of the lesson, and each reading not only serve to keep it in mind, but add something to it; especially, if title and text are repeated by the circle before the reading begins.

For special seasons and occasions we might suggest:

In case of sorrow, sickness, or death, John xiv., almost any part.

In times of trial of any kind, Psalm xlvi., with Phil. iv. 6, 7.

In seasons of religious interest, Matt. xi. 25-30; xii. 45-50; John iii. 1-21.

When special need of humiliation and repentance, Psalm li.

MODEL PRAYERS.

Monday Morning.

O LORD, with the opening of the new day, we lift our hearts to thee. Thou, in thy love, has kept us through the night; grant us thy presence throughout this day. Thou art our Father; smile upon everything we try to do that is right. Give us food, and shelter, and raiment. And bless us in our daily pursuits. t

Thou art our Saviour; keep us, O Christ, in times of temptation to-day. Let us not fall by the way through selfishness and cowardice.

Bless, we beseech thee, all the members of this household. Show to each one of us life's duty for to-day, and help us gladly to do it for the glory of God.

Command thy blessing also upon all who are dear to us by ties of kinship and affection. Bless them in basket and store, and sustain

them by thy grace, that they may live unto him who died for them and rose again.

Bless the church universal. Help thy people in every land to bear a faithful witness to thy truth and grace, and bless the proclamation of the gospel by word and life, till every knee shall bow to Jesus.

These mercies we ask, with grateful acknowledgment of all thy goodness to us, in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Monday Evening.

O GOD of all mercy and grace, thy Spirit has safely led us through the experiences of another day, and we now bow around our family altar to thank thee for thy grace and goodness. Forgive us, we beseech thee, if amid the busy pressure of our daily duties, we have been unmindful of thee and our duty.

Follow with thy blessing the labor of our hands and minds this day, and all the influences which have gone out from our lives. Forbid that anything which we have done

should be a reproach to the cause of our Saviour, or be a hindrance to the salvation of any of our fellowmen. Forgive all our sins. Take us now into thy loving keeping for the night. May we lay ourselves "down in peace to sleep," knowing that when we "awake, we are still with thee." We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Tuesday Morning.

OUR voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will we direct our prayer unto thee and look up. Accept our gratitude, O God, our Father, for all the mercies that have crowned our days; and specially we give thee thanks for the good hand that has been over us through the past night, and brought us to see the light of another day. Continue thy goodness during the hours of this day, and help us to acknowledge thee in all our ways. May we realize thy presence at all times, and rejoice in thy help and blessing. Keep us, if it be thy will, from danger, seen and unseen, from accident, disease, and evil tidings. Above

all, keep us from the evil within and the snares of the evil one. Suffer us not to be tempted above that we are able to bear, but with every temptation make a way of escape.

May all who name the name of Christ let their light so shine before men that the Father may be glorified and sinners be converted and saved.

Bless those who have gone to the uttermost parts of the earth to carry the gospel to the heathen. Make thy word effectual in their hands to the saving of many souls.

May thy blessing abide with us and with all we love to-day, and all the days of our lives, and forgive all our sins for Christ, our Redeemer's sake. Amen.

Tuesday Evening.

A GAIN we come before thee, our heavenly Father, at this evening hour, to thank thee for thy continued goodness. Thou hast heard our prayer and hast kindly watched about us, so that no harm has come nigh our dwelling or ourselves. All that thy holy eye has seen amiss in us this day forgive.

Sprinkle every heart afresh with the blood which cleanseth, and may thy Holy Spirit ever dwell within us, that we sin not.

Bless our land and people; forgive our sins as a nation, and may we repent of and turn away from all our transgressions. So may the blessing of the Lord our God be upon us, and upon our children after us.

May the blessings of grace and salvation soon come to those who are afar off. May the ignorant and those who are out of the way be brought nigh, and may the gospel ere long be preached for a witness in the whole world, and the coming of the Lord be hastened. Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly, and establish thy throne in all the earth.

We now commend us to thee and commit ourselves to thy fatherly keeping, for we know thou carest for us. Keep us in the hollow of thy hand. Preserve us from all evil. And trusting in thee, our God and Saviour, we will both lay us down in peace and sleep, for thou Lord only makest us dwell in safety. Amen.

Wednesday Morning.

OUR help cometh from the Lord which made heaven and earth, therefore we look up to thee and call upon thy name. We laid us down and slept, we awaked, for the Lord sustained us. Be with us, O Lord, to-day, in our going out and our coming in, in all our intercourse with each other and those about us, at school, and in business, in trial and temptation, in sorrow and joy.

May our lives and health be precious in thy sight, and make all things work together for our good.

Bless thy people here and in all the earth; unite their hearts to fear thy name, and their hands to serve thee faithfully and well. Fill them with thy Spirit. So may they walk with thee and adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour in all things. And may thy kingdom come and thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.

These things, with the pardon of all our sins, we ask for Jesus' sake and in his name. Amen.

Wednesday Evening.

ANOTHER day, by thy mercy, O God, has been added to the days of our lives. Our health and strength have been preserved, and in peace and safety we come to thank thee, O Lord, our God, for these tokens of thy love. We pray thee, for Christ's sake, to forgive our sins. Create in us clean hearts and renew right spirits within us. Thus may we always abide under the shadow of the Almighty. We beseech thee, O Lord, guide and direct in the counsels and affairs of our own country, and all the nations of the world. Rule and overrule, if need be, turn and overturn, and so order events that thy purposes may be accomplished and thy will be done in all the earth, and may the day be hastened when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ.

Upon our kindred and friends and the absent ones of our home may the benediction of our heavenly Father kindly rest. May the blessings of this life, if wisest and best, be granted to them; and especially we pray

that they may be members of the great family of which Christ is the head. So may they and we be the children of God through faith in Christ and continue faithful to the end, and then be gathered to the heavenly home and the higher service, to be together and forever with the Lord.

All these blessings with the forgiveness of sins we ask in Christ's name. Amen.

Thursday Morning.

OUR Father who art in heaven, wilt thou look in mercy upon us this morning and enable us to worship thee in spirit and in truth. Lord, we have sinned against thee and we deserve nothing good at thy hands; we ask nothing in our own name, but wilt thou, for the sake of thy dear Son, forgive our sins and accept of each one of us. Lord, be with us during this day, fill our hearts with love and gratitude for the blessings and privileges by which we are surrounded, and in every situation in life be present with us and aid and direct us in the discharge of our duties.

Keep us this day from all that is wrong and sinful, and in everything we do may we have an eye single to thy glory.

Enable those of us who are parents to bring up our children in thy fear, and grant, Lord, that they may love and serve thee faithfully in this life and at last be saved.

Bless our absent friends and relations. Bless our servants and all others for whom it is our duty to pray. Wilt thou own and bless the means that are used for the spread of the gospel; we would pray thee especially to revive thy work in this neighborhood, and to hasten the time when all shall know thee and serve thee.

Continue to supply our wants, direct everything for us, and at last save us all for the Redeemer's sake. Amen.

Thursday Evening.

OUR Father who art in heaven, we thank thee for sparing our lives, we thank thee for permitting us to come to thee to-night pleading the merits of thy dear Son. We have sinned against thee this day and

we have no excuse to offer for our sins. For Jesus' sake forgive us our sins and enable us to live near unto thee in every situation of life.

Wilt thou now take us and all that we have into thy care. Own us as thy servants, keep us free from sin, keep us safe from danger, and at last save us all for Christ, our Redeemer's sake. Amen.

Friday Morning.

OUR Father who art in heaven, we thank thee that thou didst take care of us through the darkness of the night and that we have awakened this morning to know of thy love and care. Take care of us, O Father, all through this day. Keep us from sin—from anger and disobedience and discontent. Help us to be truthful and honest and trustworthy in little things as in great. Help us to please thee in everything we do, whether in work or play, and to remember thy love which follows us all the time. Dear Lord Jesus, like the little children who came to thee in thine earthly life, we come to thee now,

this morning, that thou mayest lay thy hand on each head before thee and bless us.

We know thou wilt hear us because thou hast said: "Ask, and ye shall receive." Bless with us all we love, and take us to live with thee when we die, and all we ask is for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Friday Evening.

DEAR Lord, thou has given us another day of life, and for the health and happy hours it has brought to us we thank thy loving care. Let us never forget that we live on thy bounty. Forgive us, Father, if we have in any way grieved thy love, to-day, if we have done any wrong.

For every sin we have committed, great or small, give us sincere repentance and wash us in the blood of Jesus Christ our Saviour, that we may be clean in thy sight. Watch over us while we sleep, and whatever may come, let us always know thou art close beside us, with thy loving arms around us, and thus, trusting in the Lord, we will not be afraid of anything that can befall us.

Hear our prayer and bless us and all whom we love, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Saturday Morning.

O THOU great Creator of heaven and earth and all things therein, before whom angels cover their faces and all the hosts of heaven cast their crowns, crying, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty," we thank thee that though thou art so great and holy thy ear is ever open to hear the prayer of the smallest child.

Thou numberest the very hairs of our head, and knowest our every want and need for each day. Give us this day of thy loving bounty our daily bread, food for the body and food for the soul, such as thou seest we need. Help us to be useful and happy, and to honor thee in all we do and think and say.

Lord Jesus, who lovest the little children, keep close to us this day and help us to remember thy love, whatever may befall us; and what we ask for ourselves we would ask for all we love, for the sake of the Saviour who died for us all. Amen.

Saturday Evening.

HEAVENLY Father, let us come to thee this evening with sincere thanksgiving for all the mercies of the day that is past. We thank thee that no accident has befallen us, that thou hast spared to us an active mind and the use of our hands, feet, sight, and hearing.

Forgive if we have made a wrong use of any of these blessings. Forgive any sinful words we may have uttered. Keep us in thy loving care to-night, and help us to love thee better and better each day of our lives.

So keep us, dear Lord, all the days of our life until thou take us to dwell with thee at last, for Christ's sake. Amen.

Sabbath Morning.

ON this the morning of thy holy Sabbath day help us, O Lord, to put away from us all thoughts of worldly things even as thou didst rest from thy work of creation. And may we rejoice this day in the remembrance of a risen Saviour. Create in us clean hearts,

O Lord, and renew right spirits within us, that we may offer thee acceptable service on this thy holy day. Go with us to the house of God, and help us to offer there the sacrifice of a humble and contrite heart, for such only thou wilt receive. Send us in thy lovingkindness a message out of thy word, and grant that we may receive it in the spirit of meekness and love, lay it up in our hearts and practice it in our lives.

Abide with us through all the hours of this day and of our whole life; and when thou art done with us on earth take us to thyself, and to the unending Sabbath of thy presence in heaven, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Sabbath Evening.

WE thank thee, Lord of heaven and earth and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for the privileges thou hast permitted us to enjoy this Sabbath day; for the word preached in faithfulness, for an open Bible, and an open door to the throne of grace through our Lord Jesus Christ. Surely thou hast cast our lines in pleasant places and given unto

us a goodly heritage. Forgive us, O Lord, wherein we have failed to improve these opportunities, and let not this Sabbath day have been in vain for our souls.

Grant that we may grow in grace day by day and in the knowledge of Christ, and be more and more like him who is our pattern and example. Hear our prayer, forgive our sins, and save us at last with all we love, for Jesus' sake. Amen.







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